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AUNT HITTY

BIOGRAPHICAL AND REMINISCENT NARRATION

—OF—

"AUNT HITTY" AND "UNCLE THOMAS" HASKELL.

BY

MARIA HERRICK BRAY.

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BIOGRAPHICAL AND REMINISCENT NARRATION

—OF—

"AUNT HITTY" AND "UNCLE THOMAS" HASKELL.

As I repeat the names of Thomas Haskell and Mehitable Haskell, two well-remembered and honored friends, this thought comes with unction to my mind: These once familiar names are growing dim, the ranks of their contemporaries are growing less, and after the lapse of a few more years, it will be difficult to obtain any data of these two lives, or find a record richly characterized by Christian virtues, and strong mental abilities. Inspired by this thought, moved by an influence which at once brought me into spiritual harmony, with my departed friends, I was conscious of my duty, to employ my pen, in the pleasant task of recording briefly, and so far as memory aids me, biographical notes and reminiscent recollections of two worthy people.

In sending this memorial booklet out among

friends and strangers, I do so in the hope and faith that older people will receive a new stimulus to reach up and out into higher and broader realms of thought and action, and children will read of these two noted people, receiving an inspiration that will lead them to improve every opportunity, large or small, to leave a record of fidelity to truth, honesty and all the cardinal virtues.

Mr. Thomas Haskell died in 1873 at the age of 82 years, and Miss Mehitable Haskell, the last survivor of the family, passed away Saturday, November 2, 1878, in her 90th year.

Aaron Haskell, their father, died in 1834, at the age of 83 years, and few Gloucester families have been more remarkable for general intelligence, originality of ideas and strength of character than the line of Aaron Haskell. Of his nine children, seven lived beyond the age of four score years, as did many of their ancestors and kindred, and it is very doubtful if any other family in the country can point to so many instances of longevity.

Sarah, a sister of Aunt Hitty, married James Riggs and for several years was my nearest neighbor, in whom I found a true friend and helpful companion. She was richly endowed with good common sense, sterling integrity, and an uncompromising fidelity to the great principles of truth, of justice and mercy. Mrs. Riggs passed away in the year 1877, aged 96.

Uncle Thomas and Aunt Hitty spent their long and useful lives among the peaceful shades and familiar haunts of their native village, honored and respected by old and young. Physical strength, unusual powers of endurance, life-long habits of thrift and industry were very marked characteristics and combined with strong mental powers of inquiry, research and study into the phenomena of nature, art and science, developed the careful students. Their moral and religious standards were above reproach. Their belief in the commandments, in the beatitudes and the teachings of Christ was firm, unwavering and deep-rooted. Honesty and justice governed their dealings with their fellow beings.

Uncle Thomas married, and outlived his faithful wife Hannah several years. His home was only a very short distance from Aunt Hitty's, and they were both very deeply interested in the anti-slavery movement, both members of the peace society, and of the Washingtonian temperance organization, identified themselves with the earliest advocates for the right of suffrage for women, and earnest advocates that both men and women should be judged by the same standard of morality.

Uncle Thomas was a shareholder for several years in Liberty hall after it was built out of parts and parcels of the old church, which was taken down. The old church was sold at public auction November 3, 1846, and my brother, Samuel Herrick, was the purchaser. This hall was always free to all denominations, and in the winters of 1847 and 1848 we used to hold meetings for discussion and debates, on the various important subjects which confronted the people at that time and Uncle Thomas and Aunt Hitty were two of the most prominent and interesting speakers.

Several years previous to Uncle Thomas' death he became very much interested in spiritualism, and after careful investigation, and to him convincing demonstration, he became a firm believer, and found sincere joy in the communications he received from departed friends, and this great source of happiness seemed to widen out, and grow more beautiful to him even to the very close of his earthly life.

If time would allow, a more extended and exhaustive paper could be written concerning the long and useful life of this original thinker, this honest, out-spoken, kindly man, of whom we can say, the precepts of Jesus were the essential elements of his religion, and in striving daily to live them out, he entered the Kingdom of Heaven while here on earth.

This brother and sister had great sympathy, one with the other, in their ideas of progress, and the vital questions of that time which in their adjustment and settlement would in some way, directly or indirectly, affect the civilized nations of

the world, and earnestly and faithfully they worked by the aid of tongue and pen, by the liberal giving from their not over-abundant means, to help the fugitive slave in his escape from bondage into freedom. In these, and other ways, these two progressive people were a benefit to humanity.

My acquaintance with Aunt Hitty dates back about 63 years ago, one year previous to my marriage, which event took place December 21, 1845. Aunt Hitty's nephew lived with her from early boyhood to young manhood, and was an intimate friend of my husband's and together they spent many evenings with Aunt Hitty in reading and in the discussions of her favorite subjects, abolition of slavery, universal peace, the evils of intemperance, unrestricted suffrage, the sacredness of the marriage relation and its duties and responsibilities.

She had full faith that every soul was created to develop, to be something, to have a real place, and do a real work in this world, and to be faithful to the inner light of the highest and best of our con-

victions. Moral, spiritual and intellectual growth comes, she was wont to say, "from becoming more and more our real selves, and truest selves, the selves that God made us to be, and glorify God with our body by keeping it in good health, and good health helps to make healthy, strong minds, promotes cheerfulness, interest in life, interest in work, and an unfailing promoter of purity." Three great evils she often affirmed, intemperance in eating, in drinking and licentiousness were the noxious, corrupting habits, from which proceeded a large proportion of spiritual inertness, moral obliquity, and physical ill health and weariness.

It will be 62 years the 21st day of next December since I was married, and on the following day, December 22, I went with my husband on our wedding journey to spend the day with Aunt Hitty. A clear, crisp, winter morning, we made the journey on foot, a distance of nearly two miles from our home on Concord street. A cordial, hearty greeting awaited us from Aunt Hitty and her mother, a delightful old lady over 80. The parlor was open

for the special occasion, into which shone the morning sunshine and a bright, crackling wood fire gave out cheer and warmth from the wide, open fireplace.

After a social hour around the fire, we went to the room which served as kitchen and dining room, where the table, covered with a snow-white cloth, spun and wove by Aunt Hitty's deft hands, was laid with the flowing blue china, which at that time looked more beautiful to my eyes than any rare, expensive china I have seen since. After our long walk and free inhalation of pure oxygen, we were ready to do justice to the abundant and well cooked dinner of roast goose, cranberry sauce, potatoes, squash and boiled lima beans with a real pumpkin pie, and a delicious apple cake, with new, sweet butter, fresh from the churn, for dessert.

The recipe for this apple cake was, I think, known only to Aunt Hitty, and as I think of that dinner, after a lapse of more than half a century, I say, to myself, it was a dinner fit for a king and queen to partake of. Popped corn, apples roasted

in front of the open fire, a pitcher of hot ginger tea, were the simple refreshments for the evening offered by our hospitable hostess before we started on our homeward walk by moonlight.

Ah! the memories of that day and evening are still clear and precious, and while there is a vast difference between the marriage ceremonial prescribed by custom and regulated by formality and etiquette as we find them today, and of 60 years ago, I doubt if the bridal couples of the present age enjoy their wedding journeys perchance by land and sea, their costly wedding receptions, the "at home," on a certain date, etceteras, than we two, who on the day after the solemnization of our marriage enjoyed a happy, pleasant season with our true, helpful friend, Aunt Hitty.

In her younger days Aunt Hitty followed the trade of a tailoress, and went from house to house to cut and make home-spun clothes for men and boys, and was always a welcome inmate of the family who needed her services, with her large shears, the tailor's goose (a large smoothing iron)

and all the utensils needed by the tailoress. She was also skilled in the art of spinning and weaving, and in the making of braided mats, and of patchwork quilts, and an altogether good, thrifty housekeeper.

About the year 1817 she was from what I have heard of her at that time almost puritanically religious, and at a period long before the era of women preachers, club women and women lecturers, Aunt Hitty travelled to some extent, preaching and proclaiming her ideas from pulpit and from the platform of village schoolhouses, and just here, I have a letter that fortunately came into my possession several years ago, from the reading of which, you will, I am sure, get a very correct idea of her religious views, impressions and emotions 90 years ago.

Gardiner, Me., July 20, 1817.

Dear Brother:—Feeling somewhat on my mind to write you as well as I can, it is not my lot to get above trials and temptations. I have had

some of the severest conflicts in my own mind since I left home that ever I experienced, but I have also had some of the sweet consolations of the spirit of God. O Thomas, I find that if we would be perfect we must go and sell all that we have and follow Christ. I am more established in the belief that sects and parties must fall to the earth, yet I believe it will be a progressive work, for I believe that the world will become more religious in appearance and less in reality. Think of the difference between a shadow and a substance, and then thou canst easily think of the difference between a profession and possession of religion.

O Thomas, my soul abhors these great professions of religion without the spirit which leads to meekness, gentleness, forbearance, goodness and truth.

O Thomas, my soul does long for the time to come when I shall serve God with a pure heart, but doubts and fears surround me, and I am sometimes so distressed with a fear that I shall run into something that will wound the cause of God that I know

not what to do, yet it is my determination to try to serve God, which may God grant for Jesus' sake, Amen.

Give my respects to my father and mother, brothers and sisters and all inquiring friends.

MEHITABLE HASKELL.

As Aunt Hitty advanced in years, and her opportunities widened for a more extended knowledge of Christian faith, and practice, and ethical philosophy, and the realms of her acquaintance and friendship broadened, and she came under the influence of such intellects, such deep thinkers, as Wendell Phillips, Lucy Stone, Lydia Maria Child, William Lloyd Garrison, Dr. Harriet K. Hunt, and others, of like mental and moral calibre, she changed very much, growing daily into a wider, more far-reaching radius of thought, liberality, and toleration of new and advanced ideas.

Lucy Stone was a frequent visitor to the humble home, Wendell Phillips sometimes came, also Edwin Thompson, and other pioneers in the

great reforms which 60 years ago so deeply enlisted the hearty co-operation of a large army of noble men and women, pioneers in the great and important reforms.

Dr. Harriet K. Hunt, one of the first women doctors in Boston, who studied and practiced medicine, was a personal friend of Lucy Stone and through her she made the acquaintance of Aunt Hitty, and I am quite sure it was by Aunt Hitty's special invitation that Dr. Hunt came to Gloucester in 1851 to lecture on the subject of physiology, also to meet with a small band of women, who through Dr. Hunt's influence had organized a "Health Society" for the study of the processes incidental to life, health and physiological laws. If memory serves me true Aunt Hitty was president and Mrs. Edward Dolliver either vice president or secretary.

This somewhat phenomenal organization was rather short-lived, and having no memoranda or data for reference, I cannot tell just how and when it ceased to exist. One particular episode connected with this "Health Society" is the pleas-

ant memory of a meeting held by invitation of Aunt Hitty, at her home. I went early in the morning to aid in preparing the banquet of baked beans, brown bread, cold meats, pan-dowdy and Indian pudding, with plenty of fresh, home-made cream. The women came in a stage coach, possibly ten of them in number, and I assure you, my friends, it was a memorable occasion, and no woman's club, auxiliary, or any order ever before or since, I think, enjoyed a more delightful day than we did, partaking of the sumptuous dinner, drinking from "the old oaken bucket that hung in the well" draughts of pure, cool water, walking under the shade of the apple trees, sitting together in the quaint, low ceiled "fore room," listening reverently to Aunt Hitty who sat in our midst and discussed with the tongue of an oracle and the wisdom of a sage, on religious, mental and moral philosophy. At the going down of the sun, the stage coach was at the door to take the happy party to their several homes, while I remained to spend the evening and await the coming of my husband and to assist in setting

the cosy home in its customary order. The only regret at our meeting was that Dr. Hunt could not be with us.

I was always a welcome visitor in Aunt Hitty's pleasant home, which had a strong attraction for me, and though at that time, I was young, not 20 years old, I found satisfaction in her conversation that made a deep and lasting impression on my mind. Through her teachings I realized, as by intuition, a clear apprehension or quick insight into the revealed truths, which to her mind were fully developed, of the greatness and grandeur of life. She was a close student of Emerson, and one of her favorite quotations was, "That only we have within can we see without. If we meet no gods, it is because we harbor none. If there is grandeur within you, you will see grandeur in porters and sweeps."

Aunt Hitty was not a devotee of fashion in dress, but all through her long life, followed a severely plain style of dressing. Her best dress was of some inexpensive soft grey material, the

skirt short enough to clear the dirt and debris drifting about the streets and roadways. A cape of the same material was her simple dress, or a grey shawl, and a neat grey silk Quaker bonnet made up her go-to-meeting and visiting costume. Gloves were never regarded as an essential adjunct to her outfit, except in severe cold weather to protect her hands and keep them warm. At home, about her work in doors and out, she wore for many years the bloomer costume which she found very convenient and suitable for a working dress, and had the courage of her convictions to wear it.

I close this fragmentary reminiscence and biographical sketch with the consciousness of having failed to fully delineate the picture which my memory holds of a wise, far-sighted, brave, tender and loving woman, whose memory I revere, honor and cherish with the assurance that the influence of her teachings, of her example in her daily life, her leading and directing my reading, has given at least a quiet strength and helpfulness, and woven into the woof and warp of my life golden

threads of optimistic faith, hope and belief in the actual reaching out and up into Infinite Life in which "we live, move and have our being."

For several months she suffered from dropsy, but her mind remained clear and unclouded, and while she realized that the earthly life was drawing to a close, death had no terrors for her, it was only transition. "This life of mortal breath" was to her "but a suburb of the life elysian whose portal we call death."

Almost her last words were "There are more on the other side than on this to give me greeting," and so "Serenely to her rest she passed while the sweet memories of her virtues yet linger, like twilight hues when the bright sun is set."

Aunt Hitty's funeral took place from her cottage home Tuesday morning, November 5, with a large gathering of relatives, neighbors and friends, who came from far and near to pay their tributes of respect and love. In accordance with her request, the services were very simple, consisting of addresses by her two tried and valued friends, Lucy Stone and Wendell Phillips.

Wendell Phillips' address at the funeral of Aunt Hitty Haskell:

FRIENDS:—You all know well that the dear friend who has left us was singular; I do not mean in the sense of odd, but that she was individually peculiar in all her views of life and duty and in regard to the services that should be rendered to the dust of those who had passed away, and in the meaning that she put on the great problems of life. It will not surprise you, therefore, that she called only on her friend, Lucy Stone and myself, not on the ordinary ministry, for any words to be tendered at such a gathering as this, when we reverently lay her dust away with her kindred. It could hardly be a fitting close to a life full of such testimony against ceremony, against routine, full of such loyalty to essentials, to the real and realties of life, it would hardly be a fitting close if she had not borne her testimony even in this last possible word that was uttered over her grave, against what all her life had been an effort to change; for if there was anything peculiarly characteristic of the friend

that has gone, it was her individual independence.

Mr. Emerson said, and she loved to quote many of his sayings, "Be yourself; do not imitate others; do not lose yourself in the forms and mockery of life." She was peculiarly herself. She let her own nature flower out. She deemed nothing bad that God had planted in her soul. I remember one of the last remarks she made to me some ten days ago, when I saw her, that she thought if we would let our nature grow, if we would let our powers naturally evolve, if we were not afraid of our own peculiarities, that we should do better service to God; that if we would not put our thoughts under confinement, shaping them after some other model, obeying anybody else's maxims, we were sufficient for ourselves. I well remember the earnestness with which she insisted upon this sufficiency of man's self to himself. That seemed to be the key to her life. I never knew a more independent working in any intelligent being than in her case. She seemed, not defiant, not to lack appreciation of what others could suggest to her,

for she was humble, she was generous in her appreciation of the gifts of others, but in the last resort, in the last analysis, she was willing to rely on herself.

This is one of the great lessons Americans need to learn, to overcome this deference to public opinion, this submission to fashion, this running in a groove, this being contented for one man to be made in another's model, this longing to know what other men think, what the general judgment will be, this unwillingness to listen to the voice of God in our own souls. I always thought that this was one of the finest characteristics of the friend we mourn today—or rather we do not mourn her; like a ripe fruit, full of years, having faithfully met her duties, she throws off the burden of dust and broadens to higher duties, a broader outlook even than she had here. There is hardly a change in this change of death to her. We can hardly conceive of any more earnestness in the glorified spirit than she had in her daily walk, for she was above ordinary men and women earnest. So many men are

drowned in petty cares, there is no high-hearted serious move in life. We confound ourselves with the necessity of being amused, of getting rid of the passing hours. It is so rare to meet persons whose walk is full of earnestness; who live on a high level.

It is said of Charles Sumner that hardly a line in his works stirs a smile, his life was one every moment of which was crowded with an earnest desire to use it to the best advantage. And she had that same motive. She was crowned by an earnestness of purpose. She was never found idle. She was willing to work, calling nothing drudgery that would minister to another's comfort or her own necessity. She still made time, out of what we should have thought perhaps a narrow life, to consider the broadest problems, and think upon all the disputed questions of the age. And although deeply interested, profoundly interested, in such questions, I never saw in her the slightest intolerance. Earnest in her convictions, decided in her opinions, she always felt the perfect right of another human being to differ from her.

Narrowness is afraid of dispute and discussion, because in its superficial examination it distrusts the soundness of its own opinions. I remember Aunt Hitty was constantly willing the winds of doctrine should blow from every quarter, that everything should be stated on the other side. She had no fear that the truth would suffer. She had full courage of soul, that felt she had tried as far as God had enabled her to probe down to the very bottom of existence, and if she had not found the truth, she wanted to be told. I do not think anybody ever heard her contemn another man's opinion, if she thought he had honestly endeavored to reach sound conclusions.

She set herself on a high level. Hers was no common life, not bound in by ordinary views, by the mere circle of daily duties. These she did not neglect. She was a practical woman. Her favorite Emerson says again: "Always keep your feet close to the earth; do not be a dreamer." She kept her feet close to the earth practically. Every duty was done, every sacrifice that she could be called upon

for was made. When she had earned intellectual leisure, then she gave consideration to the profound problems of the age, with rare intellectuality, with a man's brain wedded to a woman's instinct, the finest instrument God ever gives us for the solution of delicate problems.

You might have said, had you looked at her life in a country village, with not over-lavish means, that she had no great responsibility, and never would have any widely extended interests. But this earnest life, this intellectually able and morally active intellect ranged itself alongside of the grandest minds of the age. It shows how naturally sympathy marries intellect and conduct, that she could not be kept either within the locality or her dwelling or village, but was associated in intimate, constant and confidential intercourse with men and women who have shaped their times; and it may be said of her under this roof, that her hand rested on the helm of many of the great movements of the age. She had her share of counsel and suggestion that stirred the intellect of those whose

voices, heard in the Valley of the Mississippi and on the banks of the Potomac, in the grandest struggles of the age, have made an epoch or contributed to make an epoch which history will immortalize, when this generation passes into historic record. Some of you know how intimate and familiar she was with those men and women to whom I allude. How often, reverently they sat at her feet learning from her independent judgment and wiser counsel, nurtured in solitude.

The great historian of the Roman Empire said once: "Learning is useful, but solitude is the school of genius." And under this roof, given up to her own meditation, even not seeing a human face for days, she sat in the sacredness of her own meditation on deep problems, and God showed her clearer light, so that when we gather around this dust of 90 years it is not that of a person who has ministered merely to the comfort of kindred, or to the local life of a small community, it is of one whose active brain has been by the blessing of God a strength and a help to break the chains of four mil-

lions of people, and remove the deeper prejudice even than that which curbs the sphere of woman, and we add our testimony to her widely spread influence on the great questions that stir and interest forty millions of people.

This little stream, it is almost perhaps a few drops of water in comparison with the millions of the country. You can almost hide it with your hand, men would say. So you can the fountains of the Mississippi, over which I once stepped. As it develops, it gathers tributes of friendship and associations and companionship and co-operation, till it bears up the navies of the nation, and pouring into the gulf feeds the ocean itself. So of this life, which has not ended. This hamlet will long tell of the curious, independent, original, influential, intellectual woman, human being. Your children will remember, and it will be borne down, how long God granted her life; how erroneously men judged her; perhaps how lonely ordinary neighbors thought her existence, not comprehending the invisible ties, the intellectual bonds, that linked

her with the great world of thought, to the great wave of progress. You come to pay the last tribute of respect not merely to an old neighbor, associated with a historic name on these plains and these hills, you come not to pay your respect to the last representative of a prior generation that reminds you of the hardness and austerity and sterile nature of her early girlhood; but you come to pay your last tribute of respect to the dust of one who rose above these limitations by force of rare intellectual vigor and unconquerable will, who created her own life, drawing to itself minds of wide influence; who never failed at the stern command of duty, who, as you remember, some of you, faced your contempt, faced unpopularity and trod it under her feet, and waited till you grew wiser and the world came round to her opinion, mellowed into the fruits that God had shown as the results of great reforms.

It seems as if this roof must bless us; as if the spirit that so long dwelt here, making it a fountain of strength and a source of light, were still here; as if you would bring your children in time to come

to this little dwelling and make it historical. I stood at the door of John Brown's house, of a winter afternoon, and looked out on just such a gathering of a hundred of his neighbors. He that lived there has passed into history. That spot, consecrated by the martyrdom of the most heroic American of his age, is now a Mecca for Pilgrims to seek. His was a martyrdom that was lifted up in the sight of men to gather courage over every conflict. These 90 years that are ended were a martyrdom almost as real; over burning ploughshares her early feet walked, for you remember the scorn and rebuke and dislike with which her opinions were received; how she walked among you often despised. Now, the world all changed, and millions converted to her ideas, she is passing ahead in front of us, ever fresh, and beckoning us onward in her intellectual progress. She goes down to her grave having made the world better than she found it, having made it wiser, having contributed to make it freer.

And this broken body has dropped. God calls

her to a higher sphere. She had more on the other side with whom she had labored than on this. I can see that band ready to welcome her to that heaven of duty and effort, of successful effort, stronger, more united and with more visible results. She died with the testimony on her lips. "All ready, all bright, I have a deeper faith in the love of God than ever." Love of humanity showed her in the last hours the love of God. Rounded into perfection, her sun set in no clouds. Surviving many of her co-workers, she goes up to join them. The record is sealed. Long intimate in her household life, I saw no defects. Ever industrious, full of labor, earnest, tolerant, intellectual, living for a high purpose, on the level of the grandest effort, with the highest devotion to duty, what more can you ask? No matter that she did not accept the routine of church service; everything good and perfect cometh down from God. And this life, so useful, so consecrated, full of such grand results, it could not have been anything but from the hand of the good and the great Creator. The spirit that

filled her life must have been acceptable to the Great Father, for she lived for her kind and consecrated herself to their service. She lived for her neighbor and sought his good. She knew no selfish aim to garner up into her own hands useless accumulations. Everything she spread out for service, and "inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren," the Great Master will say, she did it unto Me. If the spirit of Christianity be, as I am inclined to think it is, all gathered in these pregnant words of the Apostle, "Bear ye one another's burdens," then this life touched as nearly as any life can, perfection. For she sought to bear all burdens, to sympathize in sorrow, to do her full share to relieve all woes, and to give the world a nobler, higher light than that into which she was baptized. The blessing of God rest upon her example. The gratitude of every true man is due to her great model, and I thank God for that life, rounded and perfected for the instruction of those who come after her.

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